DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 291 619 SO 018 194

AUTHOR Hurrelmann, Klaus
TITLE Adjusting to an Erosion of Opportunities: The Experience of West German Youth.
PUB DATE Oct 84
NOTE 26p.; Research funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)
JOURNAL CIT Policy Studies; v5 pt2 p43-65 Oct 1984

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Standards; *Educational Benefits; *Employment Opportunities; Employment Patterns; Employment Potential; Graduation Requirements; *Relevance (Education); *Young Adults
IDENTIFIERS *West Germany

ABSTRACT

An increase in formal education requirements in West Germany has not been accompanied by an increase in vocational opportunities which have actually decreased in some professions. This study assessed the opinions of 40 members of the age group (born between 1962 and 1964) who received their formal education during the period of increased educational requirements about the significance of their school experiences in relation to subsequent educational and employment opportunities. The findings indicate that students perceive having reduced employment opportunities and believe that they personally have to maximize or create any employment opportunities. They believe that advanced school programs increase their awareness and readiness to question political conditions, and the more highly educated former students are the most critical ones in rating educational opportunities. The perception that schools provide opportunities to prepare for future employment does not appear to apply to contemporary economic conditions, because it implicitly promises employment in exchange for a diploma. The school experience should be redefined so that persons perceive attendance as an important element of their total life. (JHP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED291619

ADJUSTING TO AN EROSION OF OPPORTUNITIES: THE EXPERIENCE OF WEST GERMAN YOUTH

by

Klaus Hurrelmann

Policy Studies
Volume 5, Part 2
October 1984

Policy Studies Institute
London, England

SO018194

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Eileen Reed

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

CONTENTS

	Page
Housing Finance: Principles And Facts **John Ermisch**	1
Why Social Dividends Are Not The Answer **Rory O'Kelly**	24
Policy Formulation In The Energy Field **Donald Maitland**	31
Adjusting To An Erosion Of Opportunities: The Experience Of West German Youth **Klaus Hurrelmann**	43
Unemployment And Work Sharing: An Irish Comment **Michael Fogarty**	66

POLICY STUDIES, VOLUME 5, PART 2, OCTOBER 1984

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Eileen Reed

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

SO01 8194

ADJUSTING TO AN EROSION OF OPPORTUNITIES: THE EXPERIENCE OF WEST GERMAN YOUTH

Klaus Hurrelmann

From the mid-60s until the late 70s the Federal Republic of Germany experienced an enormous upheaval in the social structure of education. The economic, social and cultural changes during this period were accompanied by a rapid rise in the formal educational standards of children and adolescents. Vocational opportunities, however, have not kept up with the increase in educational opportunities. On the contrary, contractive tendencies of the labour market have become more marked in the same period, making it considerably less accessible for school-leavers. The present paper reports on a qualitative empirical investigation into the subjective interpretation and assimilation of this constellation of social conditions by 40 members of the age-group who received their school education during the phase of educational expansion. One of the aims of this project is to record the assessment by the persons concerned, who are 'children of the educational expansion', of the significance of their school career for their life history, and the estimation of their individual chances of education and employment. The intention is to analyse the way in which the members of age cohorts born during the mid-60s perceive and interpret the difficult constellation of educational and vocational opportunities; how they react to this and what conclusions they have reached for their future lives.

1. The research design

In order to achieve the aims just mentioned, the objective social, economic and educational circumstances of those studied have to

---

The author is a Professor in the University of Bielefeld. The project was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, and the research team under Professor Hurrelmann's direction has included Heike Elskemper, Heide Gaidzik-Tremel, Günther Robert, Bärbel Schön, Cornelia Seewald, Monika Springer, Hartmut Wolf and Bernd Rosewitz.

be related to their subjective assessment and reaction to the situation: and this has to be done, not only for young people differently circumstanced at a particular time, but also for the same young people at a succession of times in which the objective circumstances change. The team therefore conducted case studies in the following way. We carried out 20 interviews with pupils of an 8th grade of a 'Hauptschule' (classes 5 to 10 of an elementary school), 20 interviews with 'Gymnasium' (grammar school) pupils of the same grade, 40 interviews with the teachers of these pupils, and 20 interviews with the pupils' parents. Pupils of the Hauptschule and the Gymnasium were selected to cover educational courses of the 'Sekundarstufe I' (classes 5-10) from both types of school so as to highlight their differences. (These educational courses are differentiated in terms of an ideal type of pupil, preparing for an occupation versus preparing for university). The social composition of the pupils is symptomatic of this distinction: in 1978, about 60 per cent of Hauptschule pupils as against only about 18 per cent of Gymnasium pupils were members of working-class families (see Eigler et al. 1980:67). The inclusion of pupils from the 'Realschule' (lower grade secondary school) and the 'Gesamtschule' (comprehensive school) would undoubtedly have been appropriate and productive, but the size of the random samples would have exceeded the scope of the intensive case studies. (The West German educational system is still predominantly selective, but in areas such as Berlin comprehensive schools have been developed). In order to survey pupils with different records of achievement at school, we included, at a 50:50 ratio, pupils who a) were in danger of having to repeat the 8th grade ('repeaters') or b) had just received an annual school report with well above average marks. In addition, the selection of pupils followed a random principle. The inquiry was made up of slightly structured interviews lasting about an hour each. Information about the methodological procedure can be found in the detailed research report on the cross-sectional data analysis. (Arbeitsgruppe Schulforschung 1980:210. On the background, see Geulen and Hurrelmann 1980, Hurrelmann 1983a and Elder 1974).

The longitudinal analysis, still continuing, involves obtaining further data about the objective situation and the subjective reactions of the interviewees at yearly intervals. This has been done for three or four occasions, and the analysis of the results begins at section 3.2.

2. Social conditions: educational expansion during a phase of contraction of the labour market

Members of the age-groups 1962 to 1964 who feature in the case

studies are 'children of the educational expansion' in the FRG. They started school between 1968 and 1970 and, between 1972 and 1974, after four years of 'Grundschule' (primary school), changed to one of the secondary schools (Hauptschule, Realschule, Gymnasium) and completed their nine years of compulsory schooling between 1977 and 1979. During their years at school, the social status of school education has altered considerably along with economic, social and cultural changes.

According to statistical data, the educational opportunities of all adolescents attending school in the FRG between 1960 and 1980 have clearly increased: the proportion of Realschule and Gymnasium pupils in the 7th grade rose from 26 per cent in 1960 to over 50 per cent in 1980. In some federal states of the FRG the ratio is now about 70 per cent (Hegelheimer 1983). The chances of attaining the levels set by the Realschule and the Gymnasium have also considerably improved during this period: of the 15 to 18 year old population of permanent residents in 1980, 41 per cent completed the Realschule and 22 per cent the Gymnasium and obtained the equivalent of O-levels and A-levels respectively, compared with only about 20 per cent and seven per cent respectively twenty years earlier (BMBW 1982:62). Thus, the number of those entering a Realschule or Gymnasium as well as their success rate at these schools have increased. Of all pupils attending a Gymnasium about 56 per cent reached the 'Abitur' (final examination) in 1960 while, in 1970, the figure was already 75 per cent. This trend is still rising. Of the Realschule pupils 75 per cent reeached the 'Mittlere Reife' (O-levels) in 1960 and 90 per cent in 1980. This means that the proportion of pupils who attended all grades of a Realschule or Gymnasium has greatly increased in this period. In 1975 only about 14 per cent of pupils prematurely left the Gymnasium with Realschule levels (Mittlere Reife); in 1965 this figure stood at about 24 per cent (Drewek and Harney 1982).

Thus, it can be said that in the FRG an 'educational expansion' has taken place within the existing school system. From 1965 to 1976 the overall number of adolescents attending a Realschule or Gymnasium doubled while it increased only slightly for the Hauptschule in the same period. (The structurally conditioned shift of demand toward Realschule and Gymnasium schools was compounded by the high birthrate of the mid-60s age-groups, which were the highest of the post-war period.) The attempts to develop equivalent alternatives to the educational institutions of Realschule and Gymnasium were not successful - at least not quantitatively - in spite of the establishment of Gesamtschulen (comprehensive schools). The attraction of the traditional Realschule and Gymnasium education proved to be extremely

strong even for those families who had not been oriented toward these schools a generation earlier. At the same time, the Hauptschule lost much of its appeal despite an educational policy which has sought to reform and upgrade it.

These fundamental changes in the social structure of education have improved the educational, but not the vocational opportunities of adolescents. A direct consequence of these developments have been a change in the social status of Realschule and Gymnasium education: it is no longer an elite thing, but has become typical for the majority of an age-group. Another implication is the decline of the social significance, and of the exchange value, of school-leaving certificates of higher secondary education. The Abitur attained by nearly a quarter of an age-group today, and Mittlere Reife attained by more than half of an age-group (including those studying for the Abitur), no longer guarantee access to top careers or highly qualified occupations. Within twenty years the Realschule leaving certificate has become a kind of standard civil attribute of the young German, a necessary instrument of access to the middle and higher level careers, especially in business and the service sector. Moreover, the Abitur, in addition to being a requirement for university entrance, has also become a prerequisite for some vocational careers. An extended general school education beyond the nine years of compulsory schooling and 'above' the basic primary-level education has thus become a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of entry into attractive courses of vocational training.

Compared with those age-groups who started school ten or even twenty years earlier, the pupils born between 1962 and 1964 who feature in our case studies find themselves in a situation offering excellent educational opportunities, but a very limited chance of employment. They are caught up in the wave of educational expansion which has led to a rapid build-up of the pyramid of formal school qualifications. The selection taking place after the fourth year of primary education has become less rigorous; children even from families who have so far had a low regard for school and its values attend 'better' schools for longer periods of time, and larger numbers obtain higher school-leaving qualifications. But the latter no longer guarantee a future occupational status.

Those school leavers who 'only' finish the Hauptschule, and among them those who do not obtain a final leaving certificate - they still make up about 11 per cent of an age-group (with a slight downward trend) - face a difficult situation in training and the labour market. Through pressure created by the larger numbers of Realschule and Gymnasium school leavers possessing higher formal

school qualifications, a process of displacement can be observed since the 70s in the areas of apprenticeship and work, which forces increasing numbers of Hauptschule leavers away from qualified business jobs and administrative and technical careers into manual jobs since employers prefer those who are better qualified. The rise in the average levels of educational standards reduces the employment prospects of less qualified school leavers and almost eliminates the chance of those without any school-leaving certificate (Stegman and Kraft 1982: Hegelheimer 1983).

The reason why this process of displacement has had such an immediate impact is that it has coincided with a general economic slump. Although there is a relative increase in qualified jobs during the 70s, this does not keep pace with the speed and extent to which the school system produces qualified school leavers. This has in itself created a surplus of Realschule and Gymnasium school leavers available for the attractive careers. An additional factor in the overall economic development is the tightening of the labour market which is attributable to the use of the latest technology, the increase in productivity, and the stagnation of trade because of saturation levels in certain areas of goods and services. Thus, several factors are responsible for making the transition from school to employment extremely difficult for the age-groups of the mid-60s, a situation which is compounded by the high birthrate of these groups. For many Hauptschule leavers a suitable vocational placement - in terms of traditional standards - has under these circumstances become objectively impossible.

The adolescents under review have no choice but to accept these facts as the preconditions of their educational and occupational careers. Those who, in the late 70s, left school after nine years, i.e. the period of compulsory schooling, are confronted with a hostile labour market which is marked by mass unemployment affecting especially those who are less qualified. Opportunities of further education and/or vocational training are equally rare because of the high birthrate and, consequently, the pressure of competition. Yet, they are expected to succeed in entering a career which is at least consonant with the occupational and social status of their parents.

Even in these changed circumstances, the entry into employment continues to be regarded as the crucial criterion of the entry into adult life. A failure in managing this transition is considered an intolerable event in terms of current social expectations. Even with a successful transition, there is concern that the social level of the family is maintained and that there is no drop in social status. Thus, at a period of their lives when problems of physical development and identity crises are common, adolescent school

leavers are expected to give primary concern to securing for themselves a social status. At a very early point in their life history these adolescents have to face up to the responsibility demanded of them for their future careers and lives. As 'children of the educational expansion' they have to cope with the developmental task of mastering the transition in status from school to employment in an extremely complex social and economic setting.

3. Subjective perception and interpretation of educational and vocational opportunities

3.1 The instrumentalisation of school education (Results of the cross-sectional analysis)

The first analytical step consisted in finding out from the interviews done with pupils, parents and teachers how the constellation of educational and vocational prospects described in the previous chapter is perceived on the part of the interviewees and especially which functions they ascribe to school education. This part of the analysis comprised all transcripts of the interviews conducted during the initial inquiry.

One crucial result of the interview analyses is as follows: the basic tasks of school education are considered by the majority of pupils, parents and teachers to consist in 'preparing for future life'. School is said to make 'sense' to the extent that it helps in structuring and mastering life after school i.e. the remote future. Moreover, most of those questioned emphasised the role of school in making selections and assigning status. The school-leaving certificate is rated as a relevant result of learning at school. An 'exchange value' is ascribed to the certificate for entry into life after school. The quality of the school-leaving certificate is thought to provide a more or less favourable starting-point for entry into employment which at the same time is considered by the pupils to be the mark of adult life.

This description of the role of school parallels the social interpretation: 'One doesn't learn for school, but for life'. The implication is that a young person has to pass through a phase which is vaguely defined as intermediate or transitional, lasting ten to thirteen years, preparing for 'real life' which is equated with a vocational career. During this transitional phase, which is supposedly not part of real life, an adolescent, according to this interpretation, is expected to undergo intellectual training, putting his/her needs and interests second to acquiring knowledge and securing an adequate starting position for entry into 'life'. This process may or may not be successful; what remains at the end of school is a more or less useful certificate.

The prevalence of this pattern of opinion forces pupils to

take an instrumental view of school: accordingly, the value of school education is seen largely or even exclusively in terms of the value of the leaving certificate. The acceptance of such an instrumental orientation is expected of them just when they become ready for questions broaching wider contexts of meaning. According to our analysis, they cope with this operational orientation by defining and conducting school activities in terms of work based on the laws of wage labour. Their 'payment' comes in the form of the school report with a trade-in value for spheres of life that are supposed to be more satisfying (Arbeitsgruppe Schulforschung 1980:101).

Failures in this context are perceived by all as a severe interference in the process of school education and qualification. Below the surface of a seemingly routine coping with the widespread occurrence of 'repeating a grade' there is a considerable measure of subjective suffering, borne out by our interview analyses. Initially, pupils and parents try to accept the event, blaming it on poor work, lack of interest and motivation. As pupils and parents see it, this negative attitude toward learning at school is due to the teacher's behaviour. Failure is attributed to a lack of ability of the teacher in presenting his/her lessons which, in turn, is said to affect the potential of pupils. A majority of pupils who fail see the teacher as an agent of standards of achievements at school, and it is through him and his authority, demanding and implementing these standards, that they are confronted with what is expected of them at school. Thus, failure is also 'blamed' on the teacher for failing to play his part and not redeeming the obligation attributed to school, i.e. to provide a useful certificate for future employment.

Teachers do not agree with this interpretation. They trace failure at school to the attitude towards learning and work which, in turn, is seen as dependent on personality and family background as well as the living conditions, environment, and leisure activities of the adolescent. In the interviews, teachers make it clear that they regret the apathy and lack of effort on the part of failing pupils. But they reject any responsibility for these symptoms and see no way to help pupils at <u>school</u>, where communication comes primarily by way of teaching (Arbeitsgruppe Schulforschung 1980:176).

Our analysis shows that both pupils and parents on the one side and teachers on the other interpret failure at school in a way that exempts them from any direct responsibility. This can be viewed as a kind of 'social repression' of the socially induced pressure of expectations, affecting all those involved in the institution of school. An instance of failure at school is judged by all

concerned as an unpleasant incident, since it may crucially reflect on future career at school and in life, and no one wishes to take full responsibility for it (Hurrelmann 1984). The interpretations of the adolescents concerned, however, show a strong tendency to self-accusation. In the longitudinal analysis we were able to follow up more closely the subsequent effect of these mechanisms. In particular, we examined the process of the gradual internalisation by pupils of the institutionalised evaluation of their achievements (especially as expressed in the formalised leaving certificates).

3.2 The gradual erosion of status expectations (Results of the longitudinal analysis)

So far the longitudinal analysis has concentrated on the pupil population. Out of all the pupils, those coming from a Hauptschule are of special interest because they left school during the period under review and started vocational training or went straight into employment. They are hit by an extremely difficult situation which has existed in the FRG since the late 70s and early 80s, with very few apprenticeships or jobs available.

Firstly, the longitudinal analysis aims to reconstruct as exactly as possible the educational careers of adolescents, being an important element in their life experience, and to assess the specific impact of the structural conditions of school and social environment. Secondly, we want to record subjective interpretations of the positions achieved at the time of inquiry in the educational career in terms of past and future life history. This kind of approach has rarely been chosen in the study of educational careers.

The inquiry we conducted with a total of 40 pupils started with the 8th grade, one year before the end of compulsory schooling, which was nine years at the time. From the statements made by pupils, parents and teachers, we were able to reconstruct exactly the previous school careers of all 40 pupils. In addition, we collected by means of questionnaires important social data and information on standards of performance at school (according to the teachers' opinions) at different times. Since the interviews were repeated twice, in some cases even three times, at yearly intervals (generally in late summer), we have been able to monitor individual school careers and, when it happened, school-leaving and the transitional phase leading into vocational training or employment for a further two to three years.

During the period under review, nearly all of the Hauptschule pupils investigeted undergo a 'status transition' (Becker and Strauss 1956), from being a pupil to being an apprentice or employee. In contrast to the group of Gymnasium pupils, Hauptschule pupils are

faced early in their life history with having to develop means of orientation and practical preparation for this important status transition. For Gymnasium pupils the end of compulsory schooling assumes relevance in terms of orientation and making choices only when it coincides with one or several instances of repeating a grade, and future attendance of the Gymnasium becomes uncertain because of this. For the majority of Gymnasium pupils the status transition is still a long way off. Although there is no direct need to prepare for it after nine or ten years out of a total of thirteen years of school, the anticipation of the transitional phase nevertheless is an important factor, as our analysis will show.

3.2.1 The Hauptschule pupils: acute dangers to the status transition

The 20 Hauptschule pupils included in our random sample can be divided into four subgroups according to their individual school careers as they emerged at the (then, last) interview in 1980:

a) A group of five pupils with low achievements who had to repeat grades more than once and at the end of compulsory schooling only received a simple school-leaving certificate.
b) A group of five pupils with low achievements who had to repeat one grade, but received a graded school-leaving certificate after competing the 9th grade.
c) A group of four average-ability pupils who received an average or good leaving certificate after an ordinary school career.
d) A group of six high-ability pupils who - after a successful school career - received a graded school-leaving certificate after the 10th grade ('Fachoberschulreife') which formally corresponds to the Realschule leaving certificate, but does not, as the latter, provide access to the upper level of the Gymnasium.

The five pupils of the first group come from working-class families. Nearly all of them have frequently moved and changed schools. They have been among the weaker pupils since the Grundschule years. They have left school without a graded leaving certificate and are trying to find an apprenticeship. Two of them are unsuccessful and therefore take up some preparatory vocational training. Subsequently, they succeed in obtaining an apprenticeship. The other three - they are girls - sign up as trainee workers after several weeks of searching.

These five pupils represent the 'drop-outs' of our school

system. In our sample they stand for the 11 per cent of pupils from each age-group of 15 year olds in the FDRG who leave the Hauptschule without any school-leaving qualifications every year. The selective school system has put them in the most unfavourable starting position for making the transition from school to employment.

Our interviews have shown that these five pupils are fully aware of their difficulties during this transitional process and have experienced a sense of rejection during their futile search for an apprenticeship. They feel that their failure at school might become a permanent drawback in their future life.

The case of one pupil serves as a good example. The boy comes from a working-class family. His father died two years before the first interview, his mother works as a cashier. At the time of the first interview he is 14 years old and just repeating the 8th grade at the Hauptschule. The function of school is seen in the necessary (pre)distribution of vocational and thus social positions, and this is generally accepted. Nevertheless, the boy in question says he cannot fulfil what is expected of him at school, especially since he feels treated unfairly and believes that he must defend himself against unreasonable demands on the part of the teachers. No doubt that this is why he and the others in this group wish to leave school as quickly as possible and start work.

At the time of the second interview the boy is 15. His achievements at school are still poor, his application to stay on at school has been rejected and he has to leave school shortly without a graded leaving certificate. He now regrets his poor work and would prefer to stay on. The prospect of eight hours' hard work every day seems less appealing to him now.

At the time of the third interview our pupil is 17. He did not find an apprenticeship after school. So he took up some preparatory vocational training with a large firm. After one year, he succeeds in obtaining an apprenticeship as a painter through some personal friends. After a further two years of apprenticeship, he emphasises the importance of school education for vocational training and work. Subsequently, he shows a belated readiness to conform to the demands of teachers which he had rejected when he was still at school. He has come to the conclusion that the experience obtained during vocational training taught him the necessary self-discipline and self-control he was unwilling to show at school.

We now come to the group of pupils with low achievements, but who manage to obtain a graded leaving certificate. Their work in primary education was average to good. Two girls at first went to a Realschule or Gymnasium after the 4th grade, but had to go

back to the Hauptschule from the 7th grade. All pupils of this group had to repeat one or, for one girl, two grades at the Hauptschule. During the final two years of compulsory schooling they concentrate all their energies on obtaining a graded Hauptschule leaving certificate. Having repeated a grade, the 8th grade for most of them, they are able to improve their achievements. They successfully apply to stay on at school. At the same time, they gradually have to give up their initial plans of further education. The repetition of a grade shortly before the end of compulsory schooling has greatly contributed to this; they see it as a serious break in their school career and it causes them feelings of anxiety about the future.

All of them regard the Hauptschule leaving certificate as an indispensable requirement for a 'decent job' and 'reasonable life'. The fact that their entry into work is at risk is expressed by these pupils in an emphatic dissociation from those who seem to them to symbolise what they do not wish to become: unskilled workers, unemployed, people who have to do 'cleaning work'. In order to be different from them, they make every effort to obtain the graded certificate of the Hauptschule, which in their opinion will save them from ending up as outcasts in terms of social and occupational status.

Shortly before leaving school, when these pupils apply for an apprenticeship, they receive another blow which requires them to lower their hopes in terms of future plans: they are told of the poor value of their Hauptschule certificate for the careers which seem attractive and desirable to them. They are forced to narrow down considerably their vocational orientations and career plans. Thoughts expressed in earlier interivews, that work had to be enjoyable and correspond to one's abilities, are dismissed in the last interview. They have to accept any apprenticeship they can get. They comfort themselves with the thought that they have at least formally made the transition from one status to the next, i.e. from pupil to apprentice, and that they have an income and enjoy a certain social prestige. Initial vocational orientations and goals, however, are not abandoned: they remain as plans for the future; as one pupil puts it, 'to complete one's apprenticeship first and then do something else'.

This tendency to postpone career plans to the future is even more evident for the next group of pupils: those with average ability who receive an average to good leaving certificate (group c). In the first interview they talk of ambitious plans in relation to their school qualifications and vocational interests; toward the end of their time at school they realise the limitations as they are confronted with the difficult employment situation. These pupils

initially refuse to accept the real situation as it presents itself in terms of school and job prospects compared with earlier aspirations; but after a struggle they eventually relent and adjust them to the level of actual achievements and vocational prospects. They have to prepare for the harsh reality of leaving school with a certificate which is below the level they had anticipated regarding qualifications and usefulness, and enter into an employment which, in many respects, does not come up to their expectations. Since they are aware that this may be an important step within their life history, possibly irreversible, an underlying sense of uncertainty and discontent remains. The new Hauptschule which, since the mid-60s, had been upgraded to make it secondary in character like the Realschule and the Gymnasium, and which was supposed to have lost its cul-de-sac label through the introduction of a 10th grade, had quite obviously aroused hopes of 'higher' school qualifications in these pupils. In terms of this new arrangement, they now regard themselves as failures because they were unable to fulfil the hopes associated with the (newly introduced) 10th grade.

Most of the pupils of the three groups introduced above of early leavers and those with normal qualifications are ultimately relieved that they have found an apprenticeship at all. They are ready to make large concessions as to the kind and quality of their apprenticeship. In particular, most of the girls have lowered their aspirations to the extent that they are willing to accept semi-skilled jobs. For these Hauptschule pupils the status transition from school to employment means disillusionment and adjustment to the limited employment opportunities available. In the final analysis they ascribe to themselves the responsibility for this situation which is unsatisfactory for them. They feel they have got the status of entry into employment they deserve on account of their performance at school. Criticisms of school expressed by them when they were still at school (see cross-sectional analysis) are not carried over to the transitional phase after school.

Only Hauptschule pupils with comparatively good achievements, who receive a graded leaving certificate after completing the 10th grade (group d) feel they have relatively good starting positions for entering employment. These pupils consider it most important to make a difference between themselves and the other Hauptschule pupils in terms of performance. They regard themselves as the elite of this type of school. In this way they conceal the fact that although relatively successful at the Hauptschule, they did not attain their original goals: they did not receive the 'qualifying remark' which would have made their leaving certificate equivalent to a certificate of Mittlere Reife and qualfied them for higher secondary education, for example the upper level of the

Gymnasium.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, at a very early point in their life history Hauptschule pupils are expected to make a successful status transition from school to employment. By the age of 15 they must have developed their own patterns of interpretation which serve as an orientation for the transition to a differently structured area of social experience. They have to develop strategies for mastering this transition, enabling them to translate the course staked out for them by society into a reality which is consistent and adequate in terms of an individual biography. In this, they have to depend on experiences gained at school, in the family and neighbourhood.

Our analysis, which refers to the interviews with these adolescents at various dates during the transitional phase, shows the gradual lowering of personal aspirations in terms of employment and thus standards of living. This narrowing-down process corresponds to the unfavourable classification of achievements by the school and the limited applicability of such qualifications in the labour market. Ultimately, there is nothing left for Hauptschule pupils, with or without a normal school-leaving certificate, but to adjust to the demands posed by work. Our interviewees face up to them whatever the disillusionment. Most of them being of working-class background, they know of the necessity to make a living by manual work.

In trying to come to terms with their status transition these pupils find themselves in a dilemma. On the one hand, they witness an erosion of their hopes for the future which were primarily associated with ambitious career goals, and realise that their expectation of a meaningful life after school will not be fulfilled. The idea that work might become a sphere for the realisation of different personal goals carried over from school becomes a vague hope. Of the interpretation of school, i.e. that it serves as a preparation for life, only a bare minimum remains, namely its instrumental core which, in their specific period of life, is proving a definite disadvantage. Once in vocational training or employment, they soon realise that the 'real life' they thought they missed out on is yet to be found elsewhere.

On the other hand, for the sake of their future identity, these pupils have to make every effort to interpret the forthcoming or accomplished status transition as a biographically logical and consistent event. Therefore they are forced to reconcile themselves to what they have actually achieved, even if it falls short of their original goals. Against this background, pupils make intense efforts to construct a subjective plausibility for their prospective vocational career by resorting to their biography in order to create

a sense of continuity between their changed life situation and their past (see the similar conclusions of the 'Bremer Studie' by Heinz et al. 1983).

The immediate social environment of adolescents, i.e. families, residential areas and friends, obviously provides a network of social relationships and a range of patterns of interpretation and action for accomplishing the status transition and its interpretation in a biographical context. Which type of interpretation and action is applied by the adolescents depends largely on the subculture and environmental setting.

Moreover, as mentioned before, patterns of interpretation and action show some sex-specific aspects. Significantly, in our case study the girls from working-class families living in working-class areas are the most ready to accept the reduction in vocational ambitions and future plans during the status transition from school to employment.

3.2.2 The Gymnasium pupils: long-term optimisation of the starting position for the status transition

The 20 boys and girls from the Gymnasium monitored by us can be divided into three sub-groups according to their school careers up to the interview in 1980:

a) Four low-ability pupils who repeatedly fail the 7th and/or 8th grades and are relegated to the Realschule.
b) Six low-ability pupils who have to repeat the 7th or 8th grade once, but continue at the Gymnasium with average success.
c) Ten high-ability pupils who have had good reports since primary school and have so far been able to follow courses at the Gymnasium without any problems.

The pupils of group a) leave the Gymnasium prematurely. They had no difficulties at primary school. All but one girl were recommended without any reservations to attend the Gymnasium by their primary school teachers; but all had problems at the Gymnasium right from the beginning. One boy whose father is a skilled worker leaves the Gymnasium on his own accord after repeating 8th grade, the others leave after repeating one grade twice and under strong pressure by the teachers. Later, the boy interprets his attempt to make the Gymnasium as abortive and too ambitious. The three girls - their fathers are a sexton, a master painter and a self-employed engineer respectively, and their mothers are not working - had been determined to attain the Abitur. They perceive their failure as a degradation vis-a-vis their

class-mates and a disappointment of expectations on the part of their families. At the time of the last inquiry, when their level of performance had stabilised at the Realschule, it emerged how strongly they were affected by having to leave the Gymnasium: they openly speak of doubts of their personal abilities and concomitant fears about the future which they experienced at the time.

A return to the Realschule amounts to a reduction in the future orientations open to those who leave the Gymnasium. They have to give up their original goals of finishing school and passing the Abitur. The remaining years until the completion of Realschule are regarded as an adequate though limited school career. 'Once burnt', these pupils concentrate on consolidating their good starting position at the Realschule which they want to maintain to the end of their time at school. Their self-esteem in terms of personal achievements has suffered from the relegation. They experienced the Gymnasium as exceeding their abilities; they have had to abandon hopes of attaining the Abitur, and relegation has turned this into a painful truth. Achievement levels at the Realschule do not, at least at present, allow for any improvement in the prospects for the future.

Group b) of the low-ability pupils who continue at the Gymnasium after repeating one grade feel unsure about the future for some time on account of their weak performance at school. The Abitur is no longer the obvious goal as originally anticipated. After repeating one grade, three boys can imagine themselves as a photographer, policeman or bank clerk respectively; they try to see the good points of becoming financially independent of their families. In the last interview, when achievements at school have improved, these considerations become less important to them and the others in this group. They have moved to the 10th grade, and their prospects for the future in terms of school and career have brightened up. Abitur and university reappear within their field of vision even though there are some problems, while occupational perspectives fade into the distant future.

The ten high-ability pupils of group c) have never encountered any problems at school. Three of them come from working-class, the others from upper-middle-class families, the fathers being employees in most cases. During the entire period of investigation these pupils make it clear that they intend to work consistently to obtain good average marks in all subjects of the upper level of the Gymnasium. Through this they want to secure for themselves an optimum chance to enter university. Precisely because employment is still a long way off and the possibilities of entering university are not transparent, their strategy consists in

obtaining the best possible starting position, and they are confident that a good average level of marks which they can influence through their performance will provide an important additional advantage. Nearly all of them mention 'Numerus Clausus' (restriction of admission to certain university courses; allocation on the basis of specific average marks) as a serious barrier to university entrance. In spite of their top-level achievements at the most 'high-ranking' type of school, they have doubts about getting a place at university. Three of them, from typical middle-class families (their fathers are business employees or run their own business) have, even in the first interview, when they were attending the 8th grade, indicated that their performance might not be good enough for studying medicine, which was thought attractive. Even so, to them and the other seven pupils in this group an ambitious and promising course of study at university remains the supreme goal of their career for which they are working.

One pupil of this group serves as an example of this. The boy lives with his parents in a middle-class area of Essen. His father is an industrial clerk, his mother a housewife. At the time of the first interview, he is 14, has nearly finished the 8th grade, and will shortly enter the 9th. Even at this early stage, he has exact plans for his further school career: until reaching the upper level he wants to 'take it easy', even if this should mean a slight deterioration in his marks. During the final grades at the Gymnasium, however, he intends to work very hard to attain average Abitur marks of 'one-point-so-and-so' (on a scale from 0.7 to 6.3). His aim is to obtain a very good school-leaving certificate because he feels he has no chance of entering any of the more ambitious careers if his Abitur marks are 'only' good or average. But he does not yet want to commit himself to a specific course of study.

At the time of the second interview, the pupil is 15 and just about to move on to the 10th grade. He is now able to describe his aims in more concrete terms. He hopes to achieve Numerus Clausus marks of 1.5 which he hopes will admit him to the study of mathematics. If necessary, he hopes to be admitted through connections of his father, if he does not receive the required average marks. In any case, he considers it possible that the allocation of university places on the basis of average marks may be abolished by the time he sits for his Abitur.

At the time of the third interview, the boy has just entered the 11th grade. During the previous two years of school he has not made a great deal of effort, and the work load at this level of the Gymnasium is felt to be very demanding. The pupil claims to be busy with his homework until 9pm. every night. He is more

realistic now: instead of 1.5 for an average mark, he would be content with averaging 1.6 or 1.7. He is also more explicit about his vocational aims. After studying mathematics he wants to become a flight engineer or flight-mechanic.

In contrast to the pupils of a Hauptschule, Gymnasium pupils are not faced with having to work immediately after completing compulsory schooling. They are not subjected to a change in status, but are able to keep their pupil status for a longer period. Instances of failure, however, may lead to a more or less tangible lowering of original career expectations, depending on the severity of institutional implications. All the pupils feel uncertain about their future career. They are afraid of not being able to reach their occupational goals, and thus the social status they had wished for. This also applies to high-ability pupils. From the very early years at school they accept that they are under pressure of performance. They feel they have to demand of themselves to perform well and conform to school standards - for a career which they hope to reach ten years later at the earliest. But they do not feel sure that they will succeed; the socially imposed pressure of selection and increasing competition for training and jobs is striking home and causing anxiety. On the other hand, all Gymnasium pupils are aware of the privilege and prestige linked with attending a Gymnasium. They feel as though they are working with a 'safety net', but they have become suspicious as to whether this net might have holes.

4. Evaluation of the research results: the subjective assimilation of the erosion of opportunities

The findings presented here derive from the first phase of a long-term research project. Even considering the typical methodological limitations of case studies, they provide knowledge of the subjective assimilation of status assignment during and after school as an important event in personal life history. The 'children of the educational expansion' as represented in our study by members of the year-groups 1962 to 1964 do not subjectively perceive as progress the historic event of greatly increased educational opportunities compared with those of their parents. On the contrary, they have their own worries, for example, the complex situation of the labour market. As the interviews with their parents show, the current situation is compared with that of the previous generation when the parents went to school; but the expected fruits of the 'educational expansion' have not materialised.

The subjective assimilation by young people of this situation, i.e. an objective, sizeable reduction in vocational opportunities, is consistent in one aspect: the interviewees perceive the situation in

which they find themselves as a combination of factors which have got to be reckoned with. The narrowing-down of opportunities during the transition from school to employment is accepted as fact. They do not think there is a chance to change the situation, for example, by altering the causes. Instead, they look for individual ways of responding to the situation as it is. Any strategies of action relate to considerations of how to minimise the negative effects of the situation on one's own life and, if possible, optimise existing opportunities.

The prevailing pattern of subjective assimilation of these circumstances thus consists in an individual optimisation of available opportunities to secure a favourable starting position for the transition from school to employment. The following considerations play a role in this strategy:

a) In an extremely tight labour market a pupil cannot make a definitive decision in terms of a specific orientation.
b) In order to secure access to higher career levels, one has to get into the best possible starting position for post-secondary education and training, allowing for as many options as possible.
c) The single most important element in this starting position which can be influenced is the quality of the school-leaving certificate.
d) In order to obtain the most highly qualified leaving certificate, one has to aim for the most highly qualified and versatile type of school education.
e) Whatever the type of school education chosen, one's performance and social behaviour has to be such that the best possible qualifications of the various educational courses are obtained.

The 'optimisation strategy' is a perspective of action which is not committed and may even be indifferent to questions of educational content. The different types of school education are instrumentalised within this strategy: they become means to an end, i.e. acquiring a school-leaving certificate. This certificate has, in turn, been assigned the function of being a necessary requirement for entering employment.

This strategy is applied both by the Hauptschule and the Gymnasium pupils featured in our study. The popularity of this strategy is also reflected in the evaluation of the interviews done with the parents, which cannot be fully reported here. The major reasons for this popularity, motivating both parents and pupils alike, is the safeguarding of the social status of the family.

According to their own assessment as well as that of their parents, the pupils of the age-groups investigated feel they have to obtain school qualifications which are formally at least one step above those of their parents in order to maintain the social status. Thus, nearly all Hauptschule pupils intend to complete the 10th grade - which, in this type of school, provides the best possible qualifications - because they are afraid that, leaving with just an ordinary leaving certificate of the Hauptschule, they will not be able to enter vocational training or employment which, in substance and socially, would meet their own expectations and those of their parents. Likewise, Gymnasium pupils also wish to obtain the best possible Abitur marks, ensuring university entrance, which has been made more difficult through more stringent conditions of entry, or at least securing optimum post-secondary opportunities.

What emerges from these definitions of the various situational contexts and the action strategies based on them for the adolescents interviewed, is both a reflection of and a reaction to the competition which has resulted in a process of displacement between the differently qualified groups entering training or employment, as analysed in section 2. The majority of the pupils interviewed from both types of school, and the different groups in terms of achievement levels and qualifications note with concern the objectively given constellation of educational and vocational opportunities and react as described above by adopting a strategy optimising their starting positions.

From our interviews, it further emerges that the adolescents most successful in employing and keeping up the optimisation strategy are those most capable of adjusting to the levels and standards of achievement at school generally and - probably because of this - find themselves among the high-ability pupils at the Gymnasium. But even for them, the potential risks involved in the status transition from school to university or employment, and an uncertainty that they might not be able to maintain the social status of their parents in view of the highly competitive situation, have become central topics of discussion - although the possibility of actual employment as part of their own career plans is still far off. Our analyses indicate that with these pupils as compared with the others, there is even more anxiety in relation to their plans for the future. The reason for this may be that they are worried because they have a lot to lose, namely the generally high social status which they enjoy through their families. It is not surprising that in view both of the pressure caused by expectations and the material and social support of their families, these pupils show a strong determination in holding on to the optimisation strategy.

Compared to Gymnasium pupils, Hauptschule pupils are in a

less favourable situation. Their educational courses leave them less time, and their families generally provide less financial and social support which would be required for developing and operating a strategy of optimisation. By the time they have reached the 8th grade, they are directly confronted with the risk that after the impending status transition they might end up without a socially recognised position. The 'developmental tasks' (Havighurst 1974) young people have to solve during adolescence are compressed into two or three years for this group of youths.

Gymnasium pupils, on the other hand, are able - because of a delayed status transition from school to career - to space out the accomplishment of the specific developmental tasks of adolescence. For Hauptschule pupils, the process of puberty, the establishment of social contacts with members of the same and other sex, the separation from home and the development of an individual reference system of norms and values partially coincides with the status transition, which necessarily leads to a conflicting overlap of unsolved problem areas (Coleman 1980; Hamburg 1980). During a difficult phase of personality development which coincides with a complex socio-economic situation, a socially and educationally structured constellation of circumstances demands of these adolescents that they should master a status transition which is of great importance for their future life history.

It therefore seems all the more remarkable that these objectively disadvantaged adolescents accept without complaint the most unfavourable starting position they have been assigned for the start of their vocational career, which is in fact a process of displacement by competition. The discrepancies between the socially induced, ambitious occupational aims which they have also set for themselves, and the limited opportunities actually open to them are perceived and discussed by them, but the 'solution' of this problem as they are experiencing it personally, which has placed them into an almost hopeless situation in the labour market, is interpreted by them as a process of selection by achievement and therefore regarded as justified and logical. And this although they know that through this kind of competitive process leading to displacement, some of the least qualified young peole have effectively been pushed out of the labour market. The first stage of assignment of occupational and social status to a young member of society, which is formally documented by the award by society of the status criterion of the school-leaving certificate, is accepted as legitimate and plausible by Hauptschule pupils, even when they themselves are the 'victims' of this process. Ultimately, they accept the responsibility for the way their past school careers went; their poor performance in obtaining higher qualifications is

considered an individual failure and, in their own opinion, has meant that they have not taken advantage of the available opportunities of obtaining higher qualifications.

At the conclusion of their school careers, adolescents find themselves in a starting position for their future life which predetermines the future direction of their vocational and social careers. As our longitudinal analysis of subjective interpretations of reality has shown, pupils are prepared for the assignment to a certain starting position by being gradually introduced into formalised ability groups. Clark, using the example of the American college system, has vividly described as a 'cooling-out process' the institutional measures employed by the school system which lead to a reduction in the qualificational aspirations based on school performance (Clark 1974).

Our case studies demonstrate the effectiveness of these subtle mechanisms of assignment when we look at their subjective assimilation by the pupils. Apparently, our school system, particularly the Haupschule, succeeds in effectively solving in the minds of pupils the contradiction between postulating the equality of opportunities and demanding personal achievement on the one hand, and the reality of limited vocational possibilities on the other: the position they have been assigned by school is perceived as self-imposed. In spite of a breathtaking rise in formal levels of qualification within a very short period of time and in the face of drastically reduced possibilities of entering the labour market and the resultant displacement by competition, the educational system manages the 'trick' of presenting the inequality of educational opportunities, as exemplified by the starting positions allocated to pupils for making the status transition between school and employment, as a socially legitimated process.

The next phases of our investigation, scheduled to be carried out over the next years, are designed to monitor the future course of the educational and vocational careers of the 40 'children of the educational expansion'. This follow-up inquiry will provide information on the subjective assimilation by pupils of their further careers. Then we shall also find out whether those who are at a serious disadvantage because of the constellation of unfavourable socio-economic circumstances will continue to accept their difficulties without complaint, still accepting personal responsibility for them. To doubt this is justified since the employment opportunities of this group are still becoming worse. Moreover, studies done on apprentices show that the resistance potential of adolescents definitely increases during the period of apprenticeship. The question also arises as to whether pupils from the higher-ability groups will overcome the difficulties encountered in entering

university or employment in the same way as Hauptschule leavers. A formally advanced type of school education obviously increases awareness and readiness to question political conditions. Significantly, it is the more educated pupils who are the most critical in rating educational opportunities (Meulemann 1982:245).

From our interview analyses done so far it emerges that the definition of school education as 'learning for the future' does not fit contemporary conditions. It has become an empty phrase devoid of meaning; it is bound to be perceived as misleading by pupils because it implicitly promises a redemption of the 'exchange value' of the school-leaving certificate. The time has come to define realistically the significance of the school system for adolescence, being such an important phase in a person's life history, so that school can at last make its contribution to the solution of the real, every day problems of chidren and adolescents (Hurrelmann 1983b).

References

Arbeitsgruppe Schulforschung (Ltgd. K. Hurrelmann) Leistung und Versagen. München: Juventa 1980

Becker, H.S./Strauss, A. Careers, personality, and adult socialisation. American Journal of Sociology, 62, 1956, pp.205-218.

Bundesminister für Bildung und Wissenschaft (BMBW) Grund- und Strukturdaten 1982/83, Bonn 1982.

Clark, B.R. Die "Abkühlungs"-Funktion in den Institutionen höherer Bildung. In Hurrelmann, K. (ed.), Soziologie der Erziehung. Weinheim: Beltz 1974, pp.379-391.

Coleman, J.C. The nature of adolescence. London: Methuen 1980.

Drewek, P./Harney, K. Relative Autonomie, Selektivität und Expansion im modernen Schulsystem. Zeitschrift für Pädagogik 28, 1982, pp.591-608.

Eigler, H./Hansen, R./Klemm, K. Quantitative Entwicklungen: Wem hat die Bildungsexpansion genützt? In Rolf, H.G. et al. (ed.), Jahrbuch der Schulentwicklung Band 1. Weinheim: Beltz 1980, pp.45-71.

Elder, G.H. Children of the Great Depression, Chicago: Chicago University Press 1974.

Geulen, D./Hurrelmann, K. Zur Programmatick einer umfassenden Sozialisationstheorie. In Hurrelman, K., Ulich, D. (eds.), Handbuch der Sozialisationsforschung. Weinheim: Beltz 1980,

pp.51-67.

Hamburg, B.A. Early adolescence as a life stress. In Levine, S., Ursin, H. (eds.), Coping and health. New York: Plenum Press 1980, pp.121-143.

Havighurst, R.J. Developmental tasks and education. New York: MacKay 1972.

Hegelheimer, A. Bildung und Beruf. Bielefeld: Forschungsbericht der Universität 1983.

Heinz, W. et al. Bremer Jugendstudie: Berufsfindung und Arbeitsmarkt. In Friebel, H. (ed.), Von der Schule in den Beruf. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag 1983, pp.147-175.

Hurrelmann, K. Das Modell des produktiv realitätverarbeitenden Subjekts in der Sozialisationsforschung. Zeitschrift fur Sozialisationsforschung und Erziehungssoziologie 3, 1983a, pp.91-104.

Hurrelmann, K. Schule als alltägliche Lebenswelt im Jugendalter. In Schweitzer, F., Thiersch, H. (ed.), Jugendzeit - Schulzeit. Weinheim: Beltz 1983b.

Hurrelmann, K. Ausserschulische und innerschulische Faktoren der Schu-"lerbeanspruchung. Die Deutsche Schule 6, 1984.

Meulemann, J. Bildungsexpansion und Wandel der Bildungserwartungen. Zeitschrift für Soziologie 19, 1982, pp.220-249.

Stegmann, H./Kraft, H. Jugendliche an der Schwelle von der Berufsausbildung in die Erwerbstätigkeit. Mitteilungen aus der Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung 15, 1982, pp.20-35.